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What you see is what you get!?

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English Summary

What do the people in top positions of professional organizations look like? In the Netherlands, as well as in many other western countries, the answer to this question will most likely be quite similar to the following one: Dominant ethnic, middle-aged, physically able, and man. While many of such professional organizations claim to have an explicit HR strategy in place to recruit diverse employees, systematic career inequalities in terms of objective career success, such as salary or number of promotions, between dominant ethnic and minority ethnic professionals have been and still are observed. Some of the processes and practices (re)producing such inequalities have been described previously. However, our understanding of underlying processes and practices creating and maintaining systematic (dis)advantage and inequality between dominant ethnic and minority ethnic professionals' careers is still limited. As this understanding is necessary in order to develop adequate HR strategies to ensure equal opportunities for an increasingly diverse work force, the main research question of this thesis is:

How do underlying processes and practices (re)produce observed systematic career inequalities between members of different ethnic groups in the particular context of professional organizations in the Netherlands?

Throughout this thesis, I illustrate how minority ethnic professionals experience disadvantage in their careers compared to dominant ethnic professionals, by specifically focusing on the reciprocity of the relationship between social capital and career success, the normalization of "othering", and the organizational practice of active network development.

Chapter 1 introduces the situation of diverse ethnic professionals particularly in the Netherlands by giving an overview of current numbers and research up to date. This overview reflects the picture of those working at the higher echelons in professional Dutch organizations as being mostly dominant ethnic, middle-aged, physically able, and man. Starting with

theoretically discussing the key concepts of career and diversity, this chapter further theoretically illuminates the phenomenon of systematic career inequalities by adopting a power lens.

Throughout my research on systematic career inequalities between dominant ethnic and minority ethnic professionals, three themes emerged to be of importance, namely identity, organizational practices, and social networks. In this chapter, I relate these themes to the adopted power lens (specifically referring to the mainstream view of power and the discursive view of power) in order to further highlight both the need and the opportunities to better understand the underlying processes and practices leading to systematic career inequalities between dominant ethnic and minority ethnic professionals. Based on previous research and my own theoretical elaboration, I further describe how I adhere to identified opportunities for research throughout the different studies reported within this thesis (i.e. including individual, interaction, and institutional levels of analysis; focusing on dominant ethnic and minority ethnic professionals after organizational entry; and combining both qualitative and quantitative empirical data). As a whole, this first introductory chapter sets the theoretical basis for this thesis. The chapter reflects on how the explicit HR strategy of recruiting diverse ethnic professionals plays out in terms of individual careers, and by particularly considering the role of identity, organizational practices, and social networks enhances our general understanding of processes and practices underlying systematic inequalities between diverse professionals' careers.

Chapter 2 functions as a bridge between the theoretical introduction and “the field”. In the form of three teaching cases with accompanying teaching notes, this chapter introduces three practical phenomena related to diversity in organizations. In addition to their role of leading the way from the introductory and theoretical chapter to the subsequent empirical chapters of this thesis, the three teaching cases can also be used as bridging the often-described gap between

theory and practice, as they may serve as empirical materials for teaching in classrooms or training organizational settings. The phenomena introduced in the teaching cases reoccur throughout the subsequent chapters. Teaching case 1 illustrates differences in career development for dominant ethnic and minority ethnic, and for men and women professionals at a professional service firm in the Netherlands. This illustration is based on quantitative data derived from the firm's Personnel Information System. Furthermore, this teaching case alludes to the question whether or not quantitative data is sufficient to fully understand particular (organizational) phenomena in all their complexities. Teaching case 2 presents the importance of prototypes and diverse identities in the organizational context related to career experiences. This teaching case is based on qualitative data collected by means of semi-structured interviews at a professional service firm in the Netherlands. Teaching case 3 focuses on one particular organizational practice closely related to the dominant ethnic culture in the Netherlands. This organizational practice is considered as one of the best opportunities to engage in networking or social capital acquisition: The *borrel*, or company drinks. Presenting quotes derived from semi-structured interviews from dominant ethnic and minority ethnic, men and women trainees from one of the large urban municipalities in the Netherlands, this teaching case illustrates how this particular organizational practice can be experienced differently by members of different social groups.

Chapter 3 conceptually elaborates on the reciprocal relationship between social capital and objective career success and how this relationship is affected by ethnic group membership over time. Describing the relationship between social capital and objective career success over time in the form of an upward career spiral, we show how three mechanisms of return deficit of social capital, which have been described earlier, affect this relationship by means of four

principles of social interaction. Building our argumentation along the lines of several propositions, we finally propose that: “As intra-organizational career boundaries are more permeable for dominant ethnics compared to minority ethnics, dominant ethnics do not only achieve more social capital and greater objective career success compared to minority ethnics, but they also advance exponentially faster in their careers compared to minority ethnics”.

Chapter 4 describes how individual ethnic identity affects individual career experiences, reflecting systematic career inequalities between dominant ethnic and minority ethnic professionals. Based on semi-structured interviews collected at a professional service firm in the Netherlands, we unravel how both dominant ethnic and minority ethnic identity construction is conflated with processes of “othering” in relation to the hegemonic norm. This means that all professionals experience and/or position minority ethnics as “the other” in relation to the generally accepted norm within the organization. This is reflected in individual sensemaking, interaction, and institutional practices. We further discover and problematize the normalization of othering, by illustrating potential consequences for individual career experiences. While opening up the discussion of identity matters in professionals’ career experiences, we also suggest means to move away from processes of othering by making room for alterity by making room for alterity: Stepping aside to make room for “the other” and “the other’s” perspective next to oneself and one’s own perspective can challenge the hegemonic norm and can provide a stepping stone for equal career opportunities for all professionals.

Chapter 5 considers how the organizational practice of active network development plays out for dominant ethnic and minority ethnic, men and women trainees over time in terms of career experiences and opportunities. Combining quantitative data on network structure and qualitative data on network agency, we show that all trainees acknowledge and enact active

network development as an organizational practice, while it plays out more favorable for some compared to others. We conclude that similarities and differences in both network structure and network agency among dominant and minority social group members may, but do not necessarily have to be bound to similarities or differences in diversity attributes, such as ethnicity and gender. Furthermore, our study shows the added value of combining both network structure as well as network agency data when pursuing to understand development and (re)production of network structures and their consequences.

Chapter 6 relates the findings of the different studies to each other and presents an overview of subsequent theoretical and practical implications. Discussing the overarching role of power, followed by the discussion of prototypes, norms, and scripts; of the normalization of othering; of structure and agency; and of networks, careers, and intersecting identities as themes crosscutting through all previous chapters, identifies a number of underlying processes and practices enhancing our understanding of systematic career inequalities in the diverse ethnic professional organizational context. Furthermore, this discussion highlights the interrelatedness of both these themes as well as the three analytical levels (i.e. individual, interaction, institutional) as crucial in terms of (re)producing systematic career inequalities in this particular context. Directly following from this elaboration, I suggest to consider the concept of alterity as a means to break through the cycle of (re)producing systematic career inequalities in diverse professional environments as *food for thought* for both researchers and practitioners alike. Furthermore, I identify a number of implications for future research (i.e. operationalization of diversity attributes; considering the individual, interaction, and institutional level; mixed methods; specific research context) and implications for practice (i.e. create awareness; encourage interaction; re-examine “how we do things here”; include all organizational

members). After discussing the limitations of my research, I conclude with *some final words*, posing the question whether it is time for something new in diversity management. To both academics and practitioners, I suggest to step aside and open up to possible alternatives to traditional HR interventions when approaching ethnic diversity in organizations.

